

77. *Van Oort on Birds from New Guinea.*

[Note XVII. On New Guinea Birds. By Dr. E. D. Van Oort. Notes Leyd. Mus. xxix. p. 170 (1907).]

Dr. Van Oort writes on some specimens of birds recently acquired by the Leyden Museum from the zoological collection of the "Utrecht Missionary-Union," and originally obtained in the Arfak district of New Guinea. They are referred to 22 species, among which is the type specimen of *Casuarus papuanus* of Sehlegel, an albino example of *Talegallus cuvieri*, and a young Paradise-bird of the genus *Diphylloides*, probably belonging to an undescribed species. *Macropygia nigrirostris major* is characterized as a new subspecies from New Britain. Figures are given of *Talegallus cuvieri* (albino) and *Ninox dimorpha*.

78. *Van Oort on a new Cassowary.*

[On an apparently new Form of *Casuarus* from the North Coast of New Guinea. By Dr. E. D. Van Oort. Notes Leyd. Mus. xxix. p. 204.]

Under the name *Casuarus casuarus bistriatus* is described an example of this group of Cassowaries originally obtained alive in 1894 on the north coast of New Guinea and presented to the Zoological Garden of Rotterdam. On its death in 1897 it was sent to the Leyden Museum. It is a "very near ally of *C. c. beccarii*." A coloured figure of the head of this specimen is given.

XXV.—*Letters, Extracts, and Notes.*

WE have received the following letters addressed "To the Editors":—

SIRS,—A note published in 'The Ibis' for April last (pp. 388-389) refers to the birds met with by Commander Peary, U.S.N., during his sledge-journey along the northern shores of Grant Land, extending as far to the westward as Axel Heiberg Land, during the summer of 1906. I do not

suppose that the eminent explorer claims special proficiency in the study of ornithology, but an examination of his narrative 'Nearest the Pole' shews that little or nothing in the shape of bird-life escaped his observant eye. I think, however, that I shall unquestionably prove that he has given the name of Purple Sandpiper to the Knot (*Tringa canutus*). The Purple Sandpiper (*T. striata*) is of rare occurrence in Smith Sound and to the northward. Bessels records it from Thank God Harbour in 1872, but omits the Knot. Dr. Coppinger, R.N., found Knots frequent in the same locality during July 1876, and met with one brood of five young ones, but did not note the Purple Sandpiper. Mr. Hart records the Knot as a common breeding species in the neighbourhood of Discovery Bay in 1876, but that capable observer did not meet with the Purple Sandpiper, neither did I nor any of my companions, even to the extreme northern limits of Grant Land, in 1875-76. There is, however, a definite record by General Greely, who thus writes of the occurrence of the Purple Sandpiper in Grant Land: "A few specimens were seen and obtained by us in 1882-83." Greely was well acquainted with the Knot, and records that in his opinion at least twenty pairs nested within two miles of his headquarters at Discovery Bay, in 1882-83, so that with him there could have been no confusion between the two species, but undoubtedly the Purple Sandpiper is rare in Grant Land. Thirty years ago I pointed out ('Ibis,' 1877, p. 407) that the Knot was to be met with in considerable numbers as a breeding species in Grant Land, as far as its most northern extension; and this is corroborated by Hart, Coppinger, Greely, and Peary, who under the name of "Purple Sandpiper" extends its breeding-range as far as Axel Heiberg Land. Apparently the bright orange-red hue of the lower parts of the Knot in summer plumage attracted Peary's attention, and he has jotted the bird down as Purple Sandpiper, not meaning by that term *Tringa striata*, but *T. canutus*. I now offer the proofs of this assumption. Peary, shortly after passing Admiral Aldrich's "farthest,"

along the glacial shores of Grant Land, remarks in his narrative under date 19th of June, "The O-o-o-he, O-o-o-he of the Purple Sandpiper was constantly in our ears." How closely this description of the breeding-note of the Knot agrees with my observations made in the same area and at the same time of the year. "Knots were rather more abundant; their cry reminded me somewhat of the Curlew, *Numenius arquata*. The nearest approach that I can make to describing the note are the words 'tullawee, tullawee, whee, whee,' repeated over and over again; the last two notes are much prolonged and sound very mournfully. When these birds were mating I frequently saw a female pursued in the air by a couple of males at the same time. The Knot has not the power of drumming like the Common Snipe, but after soaring in mid-air with outspread pinions was observed frequently to descend to the ground. During this descent the wings are beaten over the back with such rapid motion that a loud whirring noise is produced, which can be heard at some distance; this action is confined to the males and to the period of courtship." ('Zoologist,' 1877.) Hart remarks: "When courting, Knots play with one another upon the wing, and upon the ground, in a most entertaining manner, pursuing, avoiding, and encouraging one another; while the clear, sweet flute-like whistle of the male is frequently heard." ('Zoologist,' 1880.) I am well acquainted with the Purple Sandpiper, *Tringa striata*, in its breeding-haunts, in various parts, but its note has not the slightest resemblance to that of the Knot as recorded by Hart, Peary, and myself. May I be permitted to add a list of the birds, confining it exclusively to those met with between the 82° and 83° N.L., in the north of Grant Land, which I observed there in 1875-76, which considerably exceeds in number those noted by Commander Peary? Be it remembered, however, that the great Arctic explorer only incidentally refers to the birds he met with during an extended summer journey of exploration, whilst it was my duty to make the fullest and most accurate list attainable. If my list largely exceeds that of Peary, it was due to the

unstinted facilities for travel given me by Admiral Sir George Nares, and the co-operation of my brother officers in the British Expedition of 1875-76. We find at least eighteen species of birds reaching the most northern lands of our globe :—

*Nyctea scandiaca*, breeding.  
*Plectrophanes nivalis*, breeding.  
*Lagopus rupestris*, „  
*Streptopelia interpres*, „  
*Calidris arenaria*, „  
*Phalaropus fulicarius*, apparently breeding.  
*Tringa canutus*, breeding.  
*Sterna macrura*, „  
*Stercorarius longicaudatus*, breeding.  
*Pagophila eburnea*, apparently a straggler.  
*Larus glaucus*, „  
*Uria grylle*, „  
*Procellaria glacialis*, „  
*Colymbus septentrionalis*, „  
*Harelda glacialis*, breeding.  
*Somateria mollissima*, breeding (*vide* Markham and Aldrich).  
*Somateria spectabilis*, „  
*Bernicla brenta*, „

Yours &c.,

H. W. FEILDEN.

May 20th, 1908.

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SIRS,—Will you allow me to point out to you that your note (above, p. 201) “On a new Egyptian Bird” is not quite correct? I did not *obtain* an example of *Saxicola melanura*, as you have stated, but *saw* one during the autumnal migration of 1907.

I know this bird well in a wild state, having met with it at Aden. The example in question was sitting on a fence, within a few feet of me, in the Giza Zoological Gardens.

Yours &c.,

MICHAEL J. NICOLL.

10 Charles Road,  
 St. Leonard's-on-Sea,  
 30th May, 1908.

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SIRS,—Would you allow me to correct an error which I made in my notes on the Ground-Doves of the West Indies, published in the January number of the 'Ibis'?

Under the heading *Chamæpelia jamaicensis* (p. 111) I included birds from St. Thomas Island as referable to this form. . . .

This is certainly, as might have been expected, incorrect, and I have, in fact, since found that specimens from St. Thomas are identical with the Puerto-Rican form *C. portoricensis*, and have the same well-marked crimson base to the bill.

Under the heading of *C. bahamensis* (p. 112) I expressed some doubt as to whether the birds of this form were or were not "wholly and constantly black," as originally described by Mr. Maynard. I had the opportunity of shooting some of these birds in April last, and found that there is a distinct crimson cast at the base of the bill similar to specimens from Cuba (*C. axantha*), so that these birds undoubtedly belong to the crimson-billed race, and not to the black-billed form of the Bermudas (*C. bermudiana*). In describing *C. pallescens*, from Mexico, Mr. Ridgway states that the bill is "often (always in fully adult males?) red basally."

I obtained a series of *Chamæpelia* this winter in Mexico, and my experience is that in adult birds of both sexes the base of the bill is *invariably* red, or rather crimson.

Yours &c.,

The Hatch, Windsor,  
June 19th, 1908.

PERCY R. LOWE.

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*Proposed Prohibition to Import the Plumage and Skins of Wild Birds.*—All Ornithologists will rejoice to hear that Lord Avebury's Bill to prohibit the importation of the skins and plumage of Wild Birds was read a second time in the House of Lords on May the 19th, and referred to a Select Committee. There is probably little chance of the Bill becoming law this year, but it is a good piece of work to have got it